

# Youth Leadership Today



March, 2007

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## Kicking off the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project Newsletter!

The weather has certainly gotten colder here in Connecticut as I write this, but my mind has already moved ahead to July and the 9th annual Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum for High School Students with Disabilities.

It's hard to believe that this unique forum was started over nine years ago and brings together approximately 40 high school students with disabilities together each summer for a week to develop leadership skills. Connecticut is now considered one of the most successful in the country.

Each year, the Board of Directors and Program committee, as well as countless volunteers, come together to make this forum happen. We hold reunions to "catch up" with past delegates, and have seen wonderful young adults mature, finish college, get jobs, get engaged, and most importantly, get involved. Personal Leadership Plans and Team Leadership plans have been implemented, resulting in more disability awareness, more accessibility, giving back to communities in Connecticut, and watching fledgling legislation (hopefully) turn into a Disability Awareness Week law (more on



*2006 Delegates at January's Reunion*

that later).

We want to do more, and more effectively as the years roll on. We need to continue outreach, and gain new funding. We need to find ways to keep past delegates involved in the program, so the focus remains on youth. We need to make sure that every eligible youth in Connecticut has an opportunity

*To me being a part of this project has made me wake up and realize there are more important things in life than me. Trying to help others in efforts like this is now one of my main focuses and has even affected my college major choice.*

Stephanie Cataldo  
2006 Delegate

to apply for this terrific program. So we hope to hear from you, who have had a stake in this program. Drop us a line, let us know what you're doing, and if you are near UConn this July, stop in and say "hi"!

*Kathleen Kabara*

*President, CTYLP*

# Youth Leadership Today



## Legislative Update

One of the main focuses of the Youth Leadership project is self-advocacy, and manifesting change on a community level for people with disabilities. A team of delegates from YLF 2006 really showed that they understood the concept...and ran with it.

During the forum Rebecca Hare, the Project Coordinator for the National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth, led an interactive disability awareness history session. She also told the group about an act passed in West Virginia, designating the third week in October Disability Awareness Week in the state. The law mandates that each public school must provide instruction on disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement. To read the full text of the new West Virginia law, visit [www.legis.state.wv.us](http://www.legis.state.wv.us), and search for House Bill # 4491.

Leda Caouette, Stephanie Cataldo, Matthew Cavedon, Stephanie Marino, Justin Miller, Christopher Millette, Sara Perugini, Ismael Sanchez, and Shamika White are all part of the YLF team, the “Crazy Eights”, who want to see disability awareness and civil rights movement history education mandated by law here in Connecticut as well.



The team did some research into what had worked for West Virginia, and what system our state has in place for passing similar laws. After many phone calls, meetings and emails, this intrepid group were able to gain the attention of Rep.

Andrew Fleischmann, co-chair of the Education committee, and Sen. Donald De Fronzo to co-sponsor House Bill #5994, an Act Establishing a Disability Awareness Week. This bill specifically suggests an amendment to the statutes to establish the first week of October as Disability Awareness week.

While it's still early in the 2007 legislative session, the bill has already been referred to Referred to Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections. To track this bill yourself, go to [www.cga.ct.gov](http://www.cga.ct.gov), go to the quick search and type in the bill number - 5994. Call Senator Gayle Slossberg's aide, Liza Andrews, at 240-0482 and Representative Christopher Caruso's aide Luke Bacewicz, at 240-0480 and tell them that you would like the GAE Committee to raise Bill Number 5994, about establishing Disability History Week.

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## We're Looking for a Few Good Past Delegates

If you have an interest in remaining involved with the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project, we'd love to hear from you! Every year we need volunteers for staff at the forum, which will be held this year from Monday, July 23 through Thursday, July 26. Staff are expected to arrive Sunday, July 22.

For the past nine years, a broad-based group of dedicated individuals have been working together offering high school students with disabilities the opportunity to explore and develop their leadership skills.

During this event, volunteers and paid staff fill many leadership roles including counselor, peer-counselor, aide, nurse, personal assistants, facilitator, logistical staff and support personnel.



David Felder, 2004 Delegate with Dan Lennon, YLF 2002 Delegate (present staff member)

The event is held at the South Campus at UConn, Storrs. Lodging and meals are provided. Every year training is conducted for staff working directly with the delegates.

If you wish to be involved, contact John Gentile ([jmgsr1550@aol.com](mailto:jmgsr1550@aol.com)) or Stan Kosloski ([skosloski03@comcast.net](mailto:skosloski03@comcast.net)). Please let them know what year you were a delegate, or how you heard about the forum.



# Youth Leadership Today



## 2007 Bendoraitis Scholarship Announced

The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project today announced Matthew Cavedon as the winner of the 2007 Joe Bendoraitis Memorial Scholarship. Matthew is currently a Senior at Berlin High School, and plans to pursue a career in the United States Foreign Service as a Political Officer.

The Youth Leadership Forum is an intensive leadership training experience available to high school students with disabilities. Approximately 40 students per year are selected to attend on the basis of their school, community, and work activities, as well as their leadership potential.

One such delegate, Joe Bendoraitis, attended in 1999 from Lyman High School in Lebanon. He became completely committed to the program, encouraging others to apply and speaking as part of a delegate panel about his experiences at the forum and the effect it had on him. In 2001 he returned as a full-time staff member. In 2002, Joe died of colon cancer at the age of 21, spending one of his last weeks



*Matthew Cavedon*

attending as much of the forum as his stamina would allow.

The Joe Bendoraitis Youth Leadership Scholarship is an annual award available by a competitive application process to a past Youth Leadership Forum delegate who plans to attend an institution of higher education. In this way, Karen Halliday, who serves as Executive Director for the program says, “we wished to honor his memory and his commitment to YLF”.

Matt Cavedon is well on his way to doing just that. He is a National Merit Scholarship semi-finalist, recipient of the New England Patriots Spirit of the Community Award, Member of the National Honor

Society and Recipient of the Principal’s Leadership Award. In addition Matt is Co-chairman of the Boundless Playgrounds Junior Advisory Board, Member of the National Council on Disability’s Youth Advisory Board, Member of the National 4-H Council Board of Trustees and 2006-2007 Connecticut YMCA Youth Governor.

In Matt’s own words “I would like you to please consider my application for this scholarship so that I can carry the spirit of disability advocacy and dignity for all of us that I was steeped in at YLF to my career. Please help me to become someone who can support the rights of people with disabilities the whole world over and fight for dignity. With this scholarship, I know that I will be able to get a better education. With a better education, I know that I can champion the cause of people with disabilities in the Foreign Service. Help me to make a positive difference in the world for all people.”

We’re sure you will, Matt, congratulations!

# The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project Welcomes Kids as Self-Advocates

The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project recently started providing administrative support for CT-KASA (Connecticut Kids as Self Advocates). CT-KASA is an organization for youth, run by youth. They help youth with disabilities, their siblings and peers learn how to be self-advocates through information and support.

Connecticut is the only KASA in the nation to meet in person on a regular basis, and has hosted a national conference to showcase best practices in running a statewide KASA chapter.

This is an important transition group aimed towards young adults with disabilities. "CT-KASA and YLF have positively influenced my life. Participating in both is a superb combination. The Youth Leadership Forum provided inspiration, motivation, and a couple of skills as a foundation to reach for my goals. CT-KASA has built upon that foundation, adding layers of knowledge, confidence, etiquette, and direction for the future, resulting in the person I am today. I hope others get to experience such an opportunity in the future." states Jessica Dybdahl, 1999 YLF delegate and current co-facilitator of CT-KASA.

For more information on KASA, please visit [www.ctkasa.org](http://www.ctkasa.org)

## CT-KASA

Coordinator	Heather Northrup
Co-Facilitator	Jessica Dybdahl
Co-Facilitator	Jeff Prushko

## Youth Organizers

Michael Adamczyk  
Sarah Liebeskind  
Amber Thompson



participants at a CT-KASA meeting

## National Meeting of the Association of Youth Leadership Forums

Mark your calendars for the first meeting of the Association of Youth Leadership Forums (AYLF), April 29 - May 1, 2007. The AYLF was started as an idea for all those running Youth Leadership Forums, or thinking about starting one, in their state to conference call and share ideas about best practices, curriculum planning and more. Now its' own entity with officers and participating members from 38 states, a short conference has been planned, for planners and past delegates to meet face-to-face to increase delegate participation, retain past delegates in the planning and running of the forum, evaluation tools, and a youth panel to gain the delegates' perspective. Visit [www.montanaylf.org](http://www.montanaylf.org) for more information and registration form.

*It is the purpose of the Association of Youth Leadership Forums (AYLF) to improve employment and independent living outcomes of youth with disabilities transitioning from high school by promoting throughout the United States and its territories, the replication of the California Model: Youth Leadership Forum for Students with Disabilities (YLF).*

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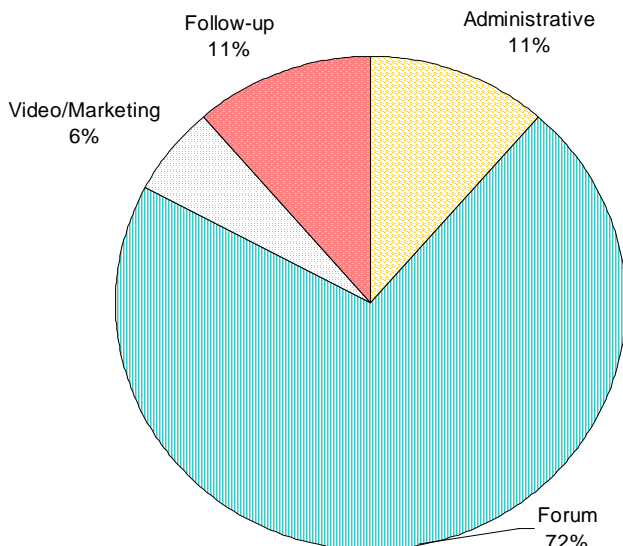


## Know of a Possible Funding Source or Want to Make a Donation?

The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project is an organization that provides opportunities for youth with disabilities to realize their leadership potential, develop strong self-advocacy skills and to have a positive influence on their community. Each year it costs approximately \$2,300 for each delegate to attend the forum and follow-up activities.

The Connecticut Youth leadership Project is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We rely on grants and private funding to run the event for 40 delegates, plus engage in follow-up activities to further the mission of the organization. The generosity of our donors is vital as we continue our efforts to develop that leaders of tomorrow from the youth of today.

We are extremely careful with the funds you entrust to our organization. Many of our Board members and staff are volunteers, and donate of their time and money for this worthwhile cause. We audit our financial statements on a yearly basis.



## Make a Difference – Donate Today!

The act of making a donation to the Connecticut Youth leadership Project will help assure that High School Students with disabilities are given opportunities to increase their leadership potential. As a 501(c) 3 corporation, a donation to the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project is tax-deductible within the fullest extent of the law

Please accept my contribution to the Connecticut Youth Leadership Project.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
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Increase your donation through matching funds. Many employers will match your personal donations. Check with your company for more information on matching gift programs.

**Mail this form and your donation to:**

**The Connecticut Youth Leadership Project  
c/o CIL  
30 Jordan Lane  
Wethersfield, CT 06109**

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